



John Nygren

WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 89TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

ASSEMBLY BILL 75 and SENATE BILL 48 TESTIMONY
Special Olympics Wisconsin Income Tax Checkoff
Assembly Committee on Ways and Means
Thursday, September 8, 2011

Chairwoman Kerkman and members of the committee,

I would first like to thank you for bringing Assembly Bill 75 and Senate Bill 48 in front of your committee for a public hearing.

I am honored to have had the opportunity to work very closely with Senator Galloway and Special Olympics Wisconsin on this legislation. This will allow us to provide another opportunity for the people of Wisconsin to support this great cause.

Special Olympics Wisconsin is a statewide organization that provides individuals with cognitive disabilities an opportunity to participate in year-round sports training and competition. This worthwhile program serves 10,000 athletes all across the state.

Special Olympics Wisconsin not only provides competitive events for athletes, it also offers preventive care and general wellness programs through their "Healthy Athletes" initiative. "Healthy Athletes" not only benefits the Special Olympics athletes through better physical and emotional health, but it also has a positive financial impact on the state. Programs offered by Special Olympics Wisconsin have been estimated to save nearly \$1 million on state Medicaid costs.

Dennis Alldridge, President of Special Olympics Wisconsin, will offer a more dynamic breakdown of the "Healthy Athletes" program following my testimony.

In Wisconsin, approximately 14,000 volunteers along with 3,500 coaches help to make Special Olympics one of the most popular charities in the state.

Currently, Wisconsin has nine income tax checkoff programs. A "checkoff" allows a taxpayer to designate a contribution out of their income tax rebate to a particular cause or fund. Since 1972, eight states have instituted checkoff programs to fund state Special Olympic committees.

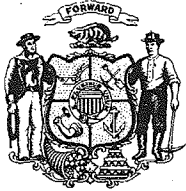
According to the Department of Revenue, tax checkoff programs generated anywhere from \$36,000 to \$336,000 in additional revenue for charities, groups, and organizations across the state. Special Olympics Wisconsin projects that an income tax checkoff will generate an additional \$200,000 in revenue for the program.

In addition, Special Olympics Wisconsin has a positive economic impact for the state. According to the Stevens Point Convention and Visitors Bureau, each attendee who stays overnight spends an average of \$141 per stay. With nearly 6,500 visitors staying in the Stevens Point area for the Olympic Games each summer, the economic impact of these four days is nearly \$1 million.

I would also like to point out that this legislation is revenue neutral to the state, as the minimal administrative costs would be deducted before the donations are realized.

In conclusion, this legislation would provide Special Olympics Wisconsin with additional revenue to continue the outstanding wellness work they do with some of the most vulnerable citizens of our state.

Senate Bill 48 passed the State Senate on May 11, 2011 on a vote of 32-1. I look forward to you joining your Senate colleagues in support of this important piece of legislation. Again, I would like to thank you for having a hearing today on Assembly Bill 75 and Senate Bill 48. This very small request is something we can do to show our gratitude to the hardworking volunteers, staff and athletes of Special Olympics Wisconsin.



Wisconsin State Senator

PAM GALLOWAY

Senate District 29

**Testimony on Senate Bill 48 and Assembly Bill 75
Assembly Committee on Ways and Means
September 8, 2011**

Thank you, Chairwoman Kerkman, and members of the committee for holding this hearing on Senate Bill 48 and Assembly Bill 75 today. I am in the district today, so I wanted to submit my comments.

Senate Bill 48 and Assembly Bill 75 create an individual income tax check-off for Special Olympics Wisconsin. As many of you know, Special Olympics Wisconsin is a statewide organization that provides those with cognitive disabilities year-round sports training and competition. Those who are at least eight years old and identified as having a cognitive disability are eligible for participation. Special Olympics Wisconsin serves almost 10,000 athletes all across the state.

Currently, Wisconsin has check-offs for breast cancer research, prostate cancer, the Veteran's Trust Fund, and several others. It is my hope that this legislation will help Special Olympics Wisconsin generate much needed dollars to better serve its athletes and increase the number of people it can reach statewide.

In my district, Wausau hosts the Winter Games, which includes sports that range from alpine skiing to speedskating. There is no question that the winter games provide a huge financial boost to Wausau, and all the communities which host the competitions.

I know that representatives from Special Olympics Wisconsin will be at the hearing and are eager to share more about the organization and how this bill will greatly benefit them.

Senate Bill 48 did pass the State Senate on May 11, 2011 on a vote of 32-1. I do wish to acknowledge Representative Nygren for his hard work on this bill. I certainly urge your concurrence of Senate Bill 48 and Assembly Bill 75 and I thank you for your consideration.



Special Olympics
Wisconsin
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TO: Representative Samantha Kerkman, Chair, and members of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee

FROM: Dennis Alldridge, President, Special Olympics Wisconsin

DATE: September 8, 2011

RE: Testimony to support 2011 Assembly Bill 75 and Senate Bill 48 creating an individual income tax check-off for Special Olympics Wisconsin, Inc.

I would like to thank Representative Kerkman and the members of the committee for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 75 and Senate Bill 48 today. And a special thank you to Senator Pam Galloway, Senator Julie Lassa, and Representative John Nygren for your leadership with an income tax check-off bill that will benefit thousands of individuals with cognitive disabilities in Wisconsin. With the funds we will generate in passage of this legislation, we will expand our program to offer even more self-directed services to individuals with cognitive disabilities.

My name is Dennis Alldridge and it has been my pleasure to serve as President of Special Olympics Wisconsin for the last 22 years. Special Olympics Wisconsin is the largest year-round sports program for individuals with cognitive disabilities in the state. We serve nearly 10,000 athletes from age eight to our oldest athlete still competing at nearly 90 years old! And now, we are even more ecstatic that our services have expanded through a Young Athletes Program to include potential athletes from age 2 to 7 as we prepare them for entry into the world of Special Olympics.

Many of you are familiar with all the good that Special Olympics does here in Wisconsin, across the country and worldwide. Eunice Kennedy Shriver had a vision. Let the world focus on what individuals with cognitive disabilities *can* do, not what they *can't* do. She started Special Olympics in 1968 with the first Games at Soldier Field in Chicago. What started as just a track & field meet has now evolved into a worldwide movement, serving more than 3.5 million athletes in the United States and 180 other nations. Her legacy lives on after her passing two years ago...and this funding will ensure that Wisconsin continues as a leader in the movement.

Special Olympics Wisconsin was incorporated in 1972. We currently serve nearly 10,000 athletes in almost every county in the state. We are truly grassroots. Two-hundred local programs managed by volunteers in communities throughout Wisconsin provide the foundation for sports training and competition opportunities for our athletes. We manage more than 14,000 volunteers conducting nearly 150 competitions and fundraisers year-round. Almost 350,000 volunteer hours are spent each year helping our athletes.

Support. Volunteer. Compete.



Special Olympics is committed to providing free-of-charge services to all interested people with cognitive disabilities and their families in a year-round format based on a program of coach-guided, standards-based sports training and competitions. Over the last several years, Special Olympics has augmented its sports foundation by a plethora of additional services in the areas of health, family support, youth activation and advocacy. Just one fact that illustrates the ultimate impact of Special Olympics on the lives of people with cognitive disabilities – 52 percent of Special Olympics athletes (all of whom are people with cognitive disabilities) in the United States are gainfully employed, while the employment rate for people with cognitive disabilities who do not participate in Special Olympics fluctuates between 12 and 23 percent.

But we are more than just sports, and this is where this new funding will make a huge impact on the state of Wisconsin. In the last few years Special Olympics Wisconsin has become a leader in efforts to improve the health of people with cognitive disabilities. Special Olympics Wisconsin believes additional funds can go a long way to encourage positive lifestyle choices.

Until recently, people with cognitive disabilities were ignored and even shunned by society. Today they are still caught in a trap. The public believes that they have better health care than the rest of the population, but research shows the opposite:

- ½ of our program beneficiaries showed foot infections/problems causing pain and dysfunction
- 56% have untreated dental decay/gum infections – 10% urgent!
- 12% report oral pain at the time of health screening
- 30% have hearing loss
- 65% are overweight or obese
- ½ need vision correction
- 22% exhibit bone loss on testing
- Approximately 63% are currently on some kind of public assistance

Part of our ultimate goal is to get as many of our athletes as possible off public assistance with healthy lifestyle choices.

As the largest amateur sports program in Wisconsin for people with cognitive disabilities this creates a problem. We know athletes cannot reach their peak performance with these types of health issues. So we are doing something about it. In 2001 we started a program called Healthy Athletes. The Healthy Athletes initiative was developed to improve each athlete's ability to train and compete in Special Olympics. This program has grown and evolved and we are providing important health and wellness initiatives to our athletes.

In 2011, the Healthy Athletes initiative provided:

- Dental screenings, vision screenings, hearing screenings, bone density/blood pressure screenings, and prescription glasses distribution as well as range of motion, strength and flexibility testing, screening for foot and ankle deformities and a program called MedFest which provided sports physicals required for participation in Special Olympics events.

- 443 healthcare professionals such as dentists, hygienists, optometrists, audiologists, nurses, physical therapists, podiatrists, and medical doctors DONATED their services, valued at \$77,225.53.
- 1,725 athletes were screened which is more than 17 percent of the athletes we serve. With additional funds we could expand this program and reach so many more.
- More than a ½ MILLION dollars of screenings and products (sports prescription glasses, mouth guards, shoes, etc.) were provided to these athletes.

And these numbers are just from five events in 2011 – a total success.

We think this is good, we think this is valuable and we think this needs to be expanded. With the funds that will be generated by this income tax check-off legislation, we want to expand the number of lives we can touch. We know for example that for every dollar invested into the Healthy Athletes program, nearly \$5 worth of health services are delivered.

The mission of Special Olympics Wisconsin is to “help our athletes develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy, and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills, and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community.” Special Olympics has evolved over the past 40 years from just “nice” to “important” – important to the lives of these 10,000 athletes and their families all across Wisconsin each and every day.

Special Olympics Wisconsin would like to expand the number of athletes who can take advantage of the many opportunities offered through our statewide organization and expand the number of athletes who can participate in the Healthy Athletes program. And by doing this we improve the lives of our athletes – our citizens.

With support from members of this committee, AB75 and SB48 will help us achieve this goal and we urge you to vote “yes.” Thank you again for this opportunity to testify.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.